



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10

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OFFICE OF  
ECOSYSTEMS, TRIBAL AND  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

May 27, 2014

Michael L. Balboni  
Forest Supervisor  
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest  
215 Melody Lane  
Wenatchee, Washington 98801

Re: Comments on Bailey, Aeneas, Revis and Tunk C&H Livestock Grazing Analysis  
Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EPA Region 10 Project Number: 12-0027-AFS)

Dear Mr. Balboni:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed your Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed **Bailey, Aeneas, Revis and Tunk (BART) C&H Livestock Grazing Analysis** on Tonasket Ranger Districts of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in Okanogan County, Washington.

The DEIS analyzed potential environmental impacts of continuing livestock grazing on a 36,297-acre analysis area that includes Bailey, Aeneas, Revis and Tunk Cattle and Horse livestock grazing allotments (or BART) for the next 10 years. Activities would include fixing, installing and removing fences, developing and improving water facilities, and range monitoring. If implemented as proposed, the project would move resources in the analysis area to desired future conditions and allow the District to meet Forest Service policies and public laws authorizing grazing leases on public lands. Specifically, resources in Peony, Aeneas, Lost, Barnell, Cole, Patterson, Chewiliken, and Jungle Creeks are of concern because they are currently not meeting some of those requirements (p. 7).

Analysis of impacts from the project considered three alternative actions (1-3), including a No Action (Alternative 1). Under the Proposed Action (Alternative 2) and Preferred Alternative, current grazing management would continue, but be monitored to identify emerging resource concerns and take corrective measures to address impacts. Additionally, there would be additional water developments and construction and relocation of fences. Alternative 3 would include many features identified under Alternative 2, but would be implemented early and grazing management would accelerate recovery of degraded riparian resources. Under the No Action, no grazing on the allotments would occur after two years.

The EPA supports the overall purpose of the proposed action to allocate forage for livestock grazing, while improving range conditions, especially in riparian areas, and a grazing strategy that combines early season, rest-rotation grazing systems with fences and water developments to preserve and protect resources. We also note with appreciation that the DEIS addresses many of the issues we raised during the project scoping period in September 2011, including analysis of cumulative impacts and climate

change effects. Thus, we commend the Forest Service staff for working with a variety of stakeholders and considering public comments in the NEPA analysis for the project.

Overall, we believe the DEIS document includes a good description of resources in the analysis area, anticipated impacts and mitigation measures to offset the impacts. We also appreciate inclusion of recent survey data on riparian and stream conditions in the analysis area, and monitoring programs designed to meet resource management objectives by monitoring compliance and effectiveness.

Based on our review, we are issuing a rating of EC-1 (Environmental Concerns- Adequate) to the Preferred Alternative. An explanation of this rating is attached. The DEIS indicates that aquatic habitat conditions within the analysis area are in poor conditions (p. 149), and that trampling of stream banks has already resulted in widespread channel instability, excessive fine sediment delivery, and shifts in stream channel morphologies e.g., Lost and lower Barnell Creeks (p. 192). Deposition of high levels of fine sediments in streams, therefore, is one of the greatest concerns for fish habitat within the analysis area (p. 153). The DEIS indicates that streams in the analysis area have high sediment levels that most spawning habitat in fish-bearing streams are above the Okanogan National Forest and Forest Plan standard for fine sediment levels (p. 17). Even though there are no 303(d) listed streams in the analysis area, the DEIS identifies listed streams downstream of the analysis area in Lower Tunk Creek and Bonaparte Creek, Sanpoil River, and the Okanogan River, which exceed bacteria, dissolved oxygen (DO), and pH water quality standards (p. 262). Because the analysis area is upstream of impaired waters, we are concerned that continued livestock grazing would contribute to further degradation of water quality downstream. Erosion from roads and livestock grazing within the analysis area, for example, are the primary sources of sediment that makes its way to streams (p. 197), and the reason that fine sediment levels have become so high throughout the allotment and in many cases, exceptionally high (p. 153). The DEIS also states that stream bank erosion is now at a level where it is exceeding channels' abilities to rebuild banks and that it is one of the dominant stream process in the area (p. 151), which may impact water quality and fish habitat within downstream reaches. We recommend that the Forest Service coordinate with Washington State Department of Ecology as the proposed project is implemented to ensure compliance with the state water quality standards. Please note that anti-degradation provisions of the Clean Water Act also apply to those water bodies where water quality standards are met.

Since current grazing across the project riparian areas is heavy and impacts are high (p. 158), we recommend additional early actions to address streams that are currently functioning at risk, such as the Jungle, Patterson, Peony, Upper and Lower Aeneas, Lost, and Barnell Creeks (p. 22). Actions to increase shade and improve hydrologic functioning of streams (addressing fine sediment loads, temperature, width to depth ratio, and bank stability) would be beneficial. Similar actions would also benefit many riparian areas where most hydrologic impacts are found. Further protection of riparian areas may be warranted, especially around creeks that are not expected to meet desired conditions for many years, such as Peony, Patterson, Cole, Aeneas, Jungle, Chewiliken, and Barnell Creeks and other areas where impacts may affect high quality habitats and other sensitive resources.

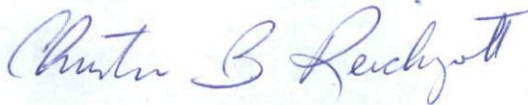
Of all the proposed action alternatives, therefore, the EPA would consider Alternative 3 to be environmentally preferable, since, compared to the other alternatives, it's actions would occur early and exclude grazing from tracts of land around streams with the heaviest bank trampling until habitat conditions reach a stable state, thus providing accelerated riparian resource recovery, mainly to stream bank stability and streamside vegetation. As noted in the DEIS, Alternative 3 would improve riparian vegetation in the analysis area substantially, moving heavily impacted sites towards properly functioning

conditions as stream banks stabilize and springs and wetland vegetation quickly rebound (p. 175). As streambanks stabilize, fine sediment delivery to streams would also be controlled, improving fish habitat within the analysis area. Overall, Alternative 3 would be more protective, as new fences and water troughs would be installed within four to six years to restore already degraded resources.

As there are fish-bearing creeks in the analysis area (Aeneas, Barnell, and Lost Creeks and tributaries) that host management indicator fish species, including native interior redband rainbow and non-native eastern brook trout species (p. 150), we recommend coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and/or the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife as appropriate, to reduce risks to species and protect biota and habitat during implementation of the proposed livestock grazing. The final EIS should include any additional relevant information developed as a result of coordination with these agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this DEIS. If you have questions about our comments, please contact me at (206) 553-1601 or by electronic mail at [reichgott.christine@epa.gov](mailto:reichgott.christine@epa.gov), or you may contact Theo Mbabaliye of my staff at (206) 553-6322 or by electronic mail at [mbabaliye.theogene@epa.gov](mailto:mbabaliye.theogene@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine B. Reichgott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christine" and last name "Reichgott" clearly legible.

Christine B. Reichgott, Manager  
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosures

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for  
Draft Environmental Impact Statements  
Definitions and Follow-Up Action\***

**Environmental Impact of the Action**

**LO – Lack of Objections**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

**EC – Environmental Concerns**

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

**EO – Environmental Objections**

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). The EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

**EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory**

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. The EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

**Adequacy of the Impact Statement**

**Category 1 – Adequate**

The EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

**Category 2 – Insufficient Information**

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for the EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

### **Category 3 – Inadequate**

The EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. The EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. The EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

\* From the EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.